Executive Summary

Ring is one of the nation's largest home security companies, best known for its smart video doorbell. Tens of millions of U.S. households own a smart doorbell sold by Ring or one of its competitors. Consumer spending on home security is expected to grow to nearly $10 billion by 2023. Because Ring and other companies in the private security market facilitate sharing of surveillance information with the police, the growth of this market has and will continue to have a profound impact on how communities are policed.

Ring also offers a free app called "Neighbors" and an analog exclusively for public safety agencies called "Neighbors Public Safety Service" (NPSS). Members of the public – whether they own a Ring doorbell or not – can use Neighbors to share information about local crime and safety issues with others in their neighborhood, and to receive information from local public safety agencies. Neighbors has more than 10 million monthly active users across the country. At present, there are approximately 2000 policing agencies and 400 fire departments on NPSS.

Police and other public safety agencies use NPSS to share crime and safety information with their communities through Neighbors. Importantly, police also use the "Request for Assistance" ("RFA") feature of NPSS to request information, including videos, from users within a specific geographic area. RFAs make it easier for police to solicit such information from the public to use in their investigations.

We undertook this audit to examine how Ring allows policing agencies to use its products and services–with a particular focus on NPSS. The purpose of the audit was to provide an objective accounting of how Ring's products and services operate, to assess the possible civil rights, civil liberties, and racial justice harms that arise when a company facilitates the sharing of private surveillance information with the police, and to encourage changes within Ring that can mitigate any harms we identified. During the audit, Ring gave us access to information about NPSS that to this point has never been disclosed publicly, such as the amount of video accessed by police via NPSS and the types of crimes police use NPSS to investigate.

We considered several potential risks or harms that could follow from the relationship between Ring and policing. These include, among others, the possibility that Ring's services could increase overreliance on policing, engender bias, or impede democratic governance of police. We discuss these and others at length in Part II.

In response to the risks and harms we identified, Ring has implemented **over one hundred changes** to its policies and practices. We enumerate key changes in Part IV. Among the more notable are that:

- Ring now displays publicly every police request for information via NPSS, known as a Request for Assistance. In addition, Ring has created public profiles for every agency on NPSS and displays the full text of these RFAs on the agencies' profiles.

- Ring now is recruiting non-police government agencies onto NPSS with a specific emphasis on community safety and non-police response. At present, Ring is recruiting fire departments onto NPSS. Ring has ceased actively recruiting policing agencies to NPSS.

- Ring has committed not to onboard immigration and federal law enforcement agencies, because these agencies are not democratically accountable to their local communities.

- Ring has implemented design and moderation changes to fight bias, such as restricting the types of content that can be posted to Neighbors and creating procedures to suspend or ban users with a history of posting problematic content.

Although this audit is directed to Ring, one of our central conclusions is that it is time policymakers pay attention to and regulate the ways that policing agencies rely on commercialized private surveillance. Ring is one part of a growing, largely unregulated, market for "lateral surveillance" – private individuals surveilling one another. Police increasingly are leveraging privately-owned surveillance devices, from internet-connected cameras to automated license plate readers. Lateral surveillance may at times have security benefits, but it also has real costs, as this Report endeavors to make clear. In Part III, we indicate what regulation of lateral surveillance should look like.